

# Faith-Based Umbrella Organizations: Implications for Religious Identity\*

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## **Abstract:**

Little research has been done on the role of umbrella organizations in affecting how faith-based organizations (FBOs) relate to their sponsoring faith community. Using interviews, archival historical data, and ethnographic observations compiled between 2004 and 2008 by the Faith and Organizations Project, this article applies previous typologies for secular nonprofit umbrella organizations to faith-based umbrellas and outlines some of the benefits and liabilities that these umbrella organizations pose for both faith communities and their local FBOs.

**Keywords:** Faith-based Organizations, Religious Identity, Religious Culture, Nonprofit Organizations

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## **Faith-Based Umbrella Organizations: Implications for Religious Identity**

Numerous studies have considered the evolving relationship between faith-based organizations (FBOs) and their sponsoring faith communities (Jeavons 1994; Demerath et al. 1998; Chaves and Tsitos 2001; Chaves 2004; Wittberg 2000, 2003, 2006). Few if any of these, however, have investigated how the development of large-scale umbrella organizations – national health care systems, faith-based accrediting agencies, professional associations – affect the ways in which individual, local FBOs relate to the faith community which putatively sponsors them. Do such organizations strengthen or attenuate the religious identity of their member FBOs? Do they facilitate or weaken the ties between the FBO and its sponsoring faith community? This paper applies previous typologies for nonprofit umbrella organizations to faith-based umbrellas, and outlines some of the benefits and liabilities which these organizations pose for both faith communities and their local FBOs.

### **Definitions and Methods**

Like its companion papers in this issue, this paper draws on the interviews, archival historical data, and ethnographic observations compiled between 2004 and 2008 by the Faith and Organizations Project (Schneider et al. 2009, Schneider and Morrison 2010). The project used a purposive sample of 81 FBOs and their sponsoring faith communities, chosen to span as wide a variety of faiths and denominations as possible.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the FBOs and sponsoring faith communities were located in Maryland, eastern Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC, but a later stage of the research also included two Catholic faith communities and six African American congregations located in the Midwest, together with their associated FBOs.

For the purposes of the study, a “faith-based organization” was defined as a separately-organized and administered entity established by its sponsoring faith community to perform a

specific ministry, program, or service. Such services might include education, health care, and/or various social services ranging from housing assistance and youth ministry, to emergency aid and vocational training.<sup>2</sup> A “sponsoring faith community” was defined as that religious entity which originally established, currently operates, and/or supervises a FBO. In African American and some Mainline Protestant denominations, the sponsoring faith community might be a local congregation while, in other faith traditions, it might be an official, area-wide judicatory, such as the Catholic diocese, Methodist General Conference, or Quaker Yearly/Quarterly Meeting to which local congregations are structurally connected. Catholic religious orders also function as sponsoring faith communities, in so far as they sponsor their own FBOs outside of, and in addition to, the regular diocesan structure. In U.S. Judaism, the sponsoring faith community might be the entire Jewish population in a given region, who organize separately from their respective synagogues to establish FBOs. Alternatively, a sponsoring faith community in Judaism might be a denominationally-based faction, or one or more synagogues/temples. Among nondenominational evangelical FBOs, there might be *no* sponsoring faith community. This was the case in our sample. Instead, the evangelical FBOs in our study were begun by one or more charismatic clergypersons or lay individuals, who experienced a “calling” to begin a ministry or program. While the members or leaders of various local congregations often supported these evangelical FBOs, no one congregation or denomination officially sponsored or supervised them.<sup>3</sup>

FBOs are differently related to their sponsoring faith communities: some are housed within the church building itself and administered by the same leader(s) who head the congregation, while others, although founded by a religious congregation or a person of faith,

currently retain no formal connection to a faith community. Still other FBOs are ecumenical or interfaith in nature and draw support from several different faith communities as co-sponsors.

The present research focused on pairs of institutions – for example, a congregation and the school it had founded. In some cases, a single faith community had founded several organizations. The Jewish, Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Quaker FBOs maintained a variety of relationships to regional and national umbrella organizations, while Evangelical and African-American FBOs were less likely to do so. Some of these umbrella organizations were administratively part of the same denominational structure which sponsored their member nonprofits; others were not. For example, Catholic Charities are an official part of their respective Catholic dioceses, but the Friends Council on Education is not part of a Quaker Quarterly or Yearly Meeting. The research compared strategies across faith communities for guiding, supporting, and maintaining connections with their various nonprofit organizations, both with and without the assistance of faith-based umbrella organizations.

### **Theory and Literature on Umbrella Organizations**

The most common definition of a nonprofit umbrella organization is given by Young (2001:290) as “nonprofit associations whose members are themselves nonprofit organizations.” Young’s definition overlaps somewhat with the “Network Administrative Organization” described by Provan and Kenis (2007:234)<sup>4</sup> and the federated community service organizations described by Brilliant and Young (2004).<sup>5</sup> The member FBOs in umbrella organizations are separately incorporated, and are, to at least some extent, financially independent (Young 2001:290). At least 20% of all nonprofits in the United States belong to a national umbrella organization (Young 2001:290).<sup>6</sup>

Several typologies have been advanced to categorize umbrella organizations. The more recent of these have largely focused on the purpose(s) for which these organizations were established, the roles which they exercise vis a vis their member FBOs, and the amount of governance and decision-making retained by the members (Young 2001:294; Brilliant 2004:27-30; Powell 1990; Warren 1967). Table I summarizes this research. According to Young, goal-seeking systems rely “on hierarchical authority and unified command and control, the economy relies on reciprocity and exchange among its participants, and the polity depends on persuasion and consensus building.” (Young 2001:294)

[Table I about here]

As one recent author has noted (Gumz 2008:275), little has been written about *faith-based* umbrella associations, especially those which operate on a national level. How might such umbrellas be similar to, or different from, other nonprofit umbrella organizations? A faith-based umbrella organization would serve the roles listed in column three of Table I, for at least three or four governmentally and financially autonomous member FBOs. In theory, a faith-based umbrella organization would not directly serve or minister to a clientele itself; it would enable its component FBOs to do so in a more effective or coordinated fashion. In real life, however, many faith-based umbrella organizations often deliver some of the same kinds of services that their member FBOs do. Diocesan Catholic Charities, for example, often serve both as umbrellas for subordinate social service organizations and as service providers in their own right. Faith-based umbrellas, therefore, may be less clear-cut in their functions than other nonprofit umbrella organizations.

In spite of this blurring of roles, however, faith-based umbrella organizations resemble other nonprofit umbrellas by being focused, at least in part, on assisting and/or regulating their

component FBOs, rather than on delivering external services of their own. Thus, ecumenical community development FBOs – of which there were several in our study<sup>7</sup> – are not umbrella organizations in the sense used by this paper, because they do not supervise or regulate independent member organizations.

Other organizations and networks, also, would not qualify as faith-based umbrella organizations under our definition. Informal networks of collaboration between local FBOs are not considered here, nor are FBOs which administer branches that are not at least somewhat financially and administratively autonomous. For example, if a city's Jewish Community Center has five local branches, it would count as a single FBO, not as an umbrella organization of five separate FBOs. As will be seen below, however, financial and administrative autonomy are contested concepts between some FBOs and their umbrella organization, and the line between being an autonomous organization and being a subordinate branch of a larger whole is often difficult to draw.

Faith-based umbrella groups have, necessarily, a more complicated relationship with their member organizations than other nonprofit umbrellas, because they must simultaneously negotiate a relationship with the sponsoring faith community. They therefore vary in the amount of power which they are able to wield over their member FBOs, and in the activities they undertake. The term thus covers a wide range of possible permutations: from national associations for an entire institutional sector such as the Catholic Hospital Association or the Friends Council on Education, to local faith community associations such as a city's Jewish Federation or a diocesan Catholic Charities. There are even umbrella associations for umbrella associations: the Jewish Federation of North America is a national federation of local Jewish

Federations, and Catholic Charities USA counts as its members the 190+ diocesan Catholic Charities organizations in the United States.

## **Applying a Typology of Umbrella Organizations**

### **To Faith-Based Umbrellas**

Jewish and Catholic faith communities have established the widest variety of umbrella institutions, through which they assist a full range of FBOs. However, our study found that Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, and Quakers also connected with umbrella organizations in various ways. How do these faith-based umbrella organizations fit into the typologies outlined in the previous literature? In general, faith-based umbrella organizations are represented in the three types of umbrella organizations outlined in Table I, but they often perform additional roles beyond the ones listed there. For example, in addition to the roles listed for “Goal-Seeking” umbrella organizations vis a vis their members, faith-based umbrella organizations are also expected to perform an “Intermediary” role for the sponsoring faith community, safeguarding and preserving the religious identity and connection of its FBOs. Catholic umbrella organizations have typically been established by either a diocese or a religious order to certify, monitor, and preserve the “Catholic” (or “Franciscan” or “Ursuline” or “Mercy”) identity of their constituent FBOs. In the U.S. Jewish community, a key role of umbrella organizations is to encourage Jewish values in member FBOs and to mediate relationships with local synagogues, Temples, and concerned Jewish individuals. The Focus Plan Summary published by Lutheran Services in America lists as its first goal the fostering of Lutheran identity in its member social service organizations; to that end, LSA has provided booklets and training videos on Lutheran values in social ministry (Gumz 2008:278).

As in the “Economies” category of umbrella organizations in Table I, many faith-based umbrellas were established primarily to provide various services and networking opportunities to their member FBOs. In general, the component FBOs of umbrella organizations in this category are drawn from a single institutional sector: community centers, hospitals, pregnancy support centers, religious schools, etc. Examples might include the Jewish Community Centers Association, the Catholic Health Association, and the Friends Council on Education. Here too, however, an additional dimension is added because of the role of the sponsoring faith community. In order to preserve the faith identity of the FBO, some faith-based umbrella organizations also provide professional development services, networking opportunities, and internal employment information to individuals working there. In this capacity, they function much like secular professional associations, with membership categories for individuals as well as institutional members.<sup>8</sup> Another difference is that the initiative for establishing the “Economies” type of faith-based umbrella organization may come either from the denomination itself or, more usually, from the component FBOs (with or without official denominational approval).

Many faith-based umbrella organizations also fall into the “Polity” category in Table I, working out common positions on a variety of issues. Examples would include the Catholic Health Association, Lutheran Services in America, and Catholic Charities USA. Again, the difference is that the faith-based umbrella organization must also negotiate with the sponsoring faith community on these positions. Since many umbrella organizations often are not directly subordinated to the sponsoring faith community, their interests and positions on key national issues do not always coincide.



Attempting to fit faith-based umbrellas to the overall typology of nonprofit umbrella organizations in Table I thus poses several difficulties. Many faith-based umbrellas perform roles for several of Young's categories and thus are hard to classify. The amount of supervisory power exercised by the faith-based umbrella, as compared to the faith community, also varies, not only across faith traditions but even within them. For example, the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore exercises more extensive control over its member FBOs than similar Federations in other cities:

What did I learn about the Baltimore Jewish community? I was surprised to learn that it was – the Baltimore Jewish community, unlike the Chicago and the Pittsburgh and the Boston Jewish communities that I knew – it was very controlled by the Associated. The other communities that I worked at, organizations and agencies, if they needed to, could fundraise on their own. Here they couldn't. (Interview, former Federation employee)

Similarly, the Catholic parish elementary schools we studied were located in two separate dioceses, and each reported differing levels of supervision and control by their respective diocesan boards of education.

Still another difficulty in applying the typology is that these relationships are constantly changing. FBOs and faith communities establish umbrella organizations or dissolve them; they join existing ones or drop out. Umbrella organizations may even change their basic character: currently, many Catholic religious orders are in the process of transferring sponsorship of their hospitals away from the original religious orders and to the health care system itself. In the Vatican's parlance, national Catholic health care systems such as Catholic Health Initiatives or Ascension Health are applying to Rome for status as "Public Juridic Persons." Once this process is completed, *CHI and Ascension Health will replace the original founding religious orders as the faith community sponsor of Catholic hospitals*: they will become simultaneously umbrella organizations for their member FBOs *and* the official Catholic faith community sponsor of these same FBOs. The health care systems will then have to juggle the political and economic

interests of their component hospitals, on the one hand, and their responsibility to safeguard the Catholic identity of these hospitals on the other. Previous research (e.g. Young 2001:291-2) has found that such competing identities can result in paralysis and instability. In another example, several of our respondents in one Mainline Protestant faith-based umbrella organization noted that it had originally been established to perform the intermediary function of connecting each local congregation to the denomination's FBOs. Now, the umbrella organization primarily performs "Economy" functions for its subsidiary FBOs, and there is a corresponding disconnect with the local congregations. This umbrella organization, therefore, has shifted from serving an intermediary "Polity" role to an "Economy" one.

[Table II about here]

Table II attempts to apply the typologies in the previous literature on nonprofit umbrella organizations to faith-based umbrellas. For each of the three types of secular umbrella organization, an intermediary or a professional association role has been added to the list of functions in the third column, in order to describe the umbrella's relationship with its faith community. Even with these modifications, however, the application of the typology should be made with care. The added necessity of relating to a sponsoring faith community, the changing of roles and functions over time, and the diverse mixtures of FBO members, even within the same denomination, all complicate classification schemes and comparisons across faith communities. Nevertheless, with these caveats, the revised typology reveals important benefits and liabilities attached to faith-based umbrella membership. The remainder of this paper will compare some of these positive and negative aspects.

**"Goal-Seeking" Umbrellas: Benefits for Faith Communities and FBOs**

***Monitoring the Faith Identity of Member FBOs***

Under the “Goal Seeking” function, faith-based umbrellas provide a wide range of benefits for their member FBOs. The first of these is certification or approval of the FBO as a *bona fide* Catholic/Jewish/Quaker/Lutheran organization. The umbrella organizations articulate criteria or benchmarks which member FBOs are expected to meet, and evaluate their compliance with these criteria on a regular basis:

It was very clear from the discussion that the Associated, as the central entity for the Jewish community, had set clear rules on what makes a Jewish agency, and those were reflected in the funding. (field notes, Associated Fund Distribution meeting)

We have oversight in terms of mission, vision, Catholic identity, and we receive annual reports on them. We have developed a Catholic identity matrix. The Sponsors’ Council asks the management to do that. . . . We receive reports regularly on the VP for Mission in each of the healthcare ministries in terms of their relationship and what they are working on, as well as we have a Sponsor Liaison Committee, which are persons that the Sponsors Council appoints. Their function is to network between management and the healthcare ministry in our name as well as serve as a subcommittee for us. (Interview, chair of Sponsors’ Council, a Catholic health care system)

[Speaker] indicated that, in planning the [Quakerism Conference], it was easy to return time and time again to an invitation to Ms. A, head of the Friends Council on Education, as an opening speaker. This is her eighth year at FCE, “a fantastic umbrella group which keeps us grounded in what makes us distinctive.” (Field notes, Faculty and Staff New to Quakerism Conference)

The head of one Jewish community center noted that the national umbrella association for all Jewish community centers has established a Benchmarking Program “to measure established excellence for JCCs. One of the metrics that they are measuring is conversations that staff have – Jewish conversations as rated by participants in the programs.”

### ***Providing Faith Development Resources***

Many faith-based umbrella organizations also provide education and training modules to help member FBOs retain and strengthen their religious identity. Both Catholic Charities USA and the Catholic Health Association both provide extensive literature, PowerPoint presentations, and speakers on Catholic Social Teaching. One health care system has an elaborate, two-year educational program for the executives of its member hospitals:

I am currently a member of the leadership formation program in [health system], which is a two-year program for executive formation. We meet for intensive sessions about once a quarter across

the first year and a half. . . . They are broken up in modules. The very first module is “Introduction to Theology.” They start off with that, then into “Christology.” We have just finished up “Religious and Ethical Directives” as the last piece of that. In between the intensive sessions there is online education, weekly readings, and sharing within your group, so there is dialog back and forth. . . . Then there is the intensive and usually a short sort of wrap-up project related to that. (Interview, administrator of a Catholic hospital)

Quaker umbrella organizations provide similar educational resources:

We have an Introduction to Quakerism film that we show to all of our new employees which FSA [Friends Services for the Aging] produced – it’s called “Living with Friends.” In terms of the epicenter of Quakerism and understanding approaches, philosophy, and style, I would say that 90% of that comes through our FSA affiliation and not through the Meeting connection, which is curious. (Interview, executive director of a housing complex for the elderly)

Note that this respondent felt that the umbrella association was actually *more* important in maintaining his organization’s Quaker identity than the local Meeting to which his FBO was officially attached. Quaker FBOs look to this umbrella organization for “opportunities to share, particularly on the Quaker elements of the organization.” In a similar manner, the national Jewish Community Centers Association provides sample curricula on Judaism for local community centers to use with their clients, and Lutheran Services in America provides booklets and videos on Lutheran mission theology to its member organizations.

A difficulty with all these programs, however, is that administrators and staff from the targeted FBOs may not bother to participate in them. For example, one of our Lutheran interviewees was less than sanguine about the effectiveness of the umbrella organization’s ability to strengthen the religious identity of its member FBOs:

(Interviewer) Not being Lutheran and starting with the organization when you first started, at that time did [umbrella organization] provide any sort of formal training on what it is to be Lutheran or about the Lutheran religion?

(Respondent) At the time, no. I can’t recollect anything like that. . . . [Today], theoretically, there is little bit of orientation to what Lutherans believe in the general orientation thing. Then you are supposed to get a “Lutheranism101” packet. To be honest with you, I am not sure that happens in every case. (Interview with a top administrator, Lutheran umbrella organization)

The Jewish Community Centers Association addressed this problem by providing financial incentives to the member centers that used their curricular resources.

Not all faith based umbrella organizations perform these certification/education tasks. Most of the Mainline Protestant organizations surveyed for this study reported that, while umbrella organizations did exist within their respective denominations, they usually did not have organized programs to educate the staff and clientele of their component FBOs in the specific theology or ethos of the faith community. As a result, many of the staff and administrators we interviewed in the local FBOs were somewhat fuzzy about what it actually meant to be affiliated with the denomination. Others resisted articulating a specific identifying statement for fear of alienating clientele or staff from other faith traditions. Such vagueness may have detrimental effects on the ability of the FBO to maintain its denominational or faith-based identity in the future.

### ***Strategic Planning and Coordination***

In addition to certification and education, some of the more powerful faith-based umbrella organizations perform the typical “goal seeking” roles of strategic planning and coordination for their member FBOs. Most local Jewish Federations conduct a demographic survey every ten years in order to determine future demand for their FBOs’ services, and allocate subsequent funding accordingly. As several studies of secular nonprofits<sup>9</sup> have noted, the provision of resources gives umbrella organizations a great deal of power over their member FBOs, to the point where the latter’s independence and autonomy are threatened. In our study, several Catholic and Jewish umbrellas had actively merged or eliminated some of the activities of their component FBOs in order to achieve economies of scale:

We take a very centralized approach also for economies of scale. . . We had four social service agencies with four well-paid executive directors, with four finance directors, with four marketing directors, with four HR managers. We didn’t need that. We brought all of the social service agencies together. (Interview, manager, local Jewish federation)

The first organization that was started was National Purchasing. We had a purchasing group for our [order’s] Province which did all the purchasing for the hospitals. We saw how much money we were saving because of the volume. . . . That worked so well, and [governmental] restrictions

were coming and things were getting a little harder, so we thought that maybe if we joined together we would have a better voice. We talked about it and thought it was a great idea and [health care system] came to be. (Interview, retired CEO of several Catholic hospitals)

At other times, umbrella organizations might even create a new FBO if their strategic planning surfaced a need. For example, CHAI was created by the Baltimore Jewish Federation in order to safeguard affordable housing in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods.

Such openly directive power was confined to the more centralized umbrella systems in our sample: notably those associated with the Catholic and Jewish faith communities. But many other umbrella organizations also encouraged collaboration between their faith tradition's FBOs:

We do a lot of collaboration. . . We work on a lot of things together for at-risk teens and special needs children. We work with the Center for Jewish Education. We are talking about developing a lab school with the Center for Jewish Education down in [neighborhood]. We are always looking for new things... Down at the Associated we do all kinds of collaborative programs. Then the Chaim Farm out at [location]. They collaborated with us at camp... All these things are kind of collaborative outreaches with our sister and brother agencies of the Associated. (Interview, administrator of local community centers)

The Lutheran, Jewish, and Catholic respondents all mentioned such collaborative efforts.

### ***Centralized Fundraising***

Some faith-based umbrella organizations, like their secular counterparts, have centralized the fundraising for their component FBOs and do not permit independent money-raising campaigns. All of the money raised is then allocated among the component FBOs. Other faith-based umbrellas, in contrast, expect their component FBOs to be responsible for their own fundraising, although many do provide training and workshops on how to do this better. While some FBOs in the former category expressed resentment at having to ask their umbrella organization for permission to put on a fundraising event, others appreciated being freed from this task: "We're experts at service; you're experts at raising money." One Catholic high school president expressed his appreciation for the role of the local diocesan education office in raising and providing several million dollars for the expansion of the school's physical plant.

Less welcome, perhaps – at least by some FBOs – was the redistributive function of Goal-Seeking umbrella organizations, which often allocated monies preferentially to some FBOs more than to others. Despite these reservations, however, the fundraising and redistribution role of umbrella organizations was appreciated by most of our respondents. Interviewees from FBOs whose denominational sponsors or umbrella organizations did *not* support them by fundraising often expressed their disappointment with this situation:

“The disappointing part is the lack of support from the Conference. We are not able to get in the church directory or funding or anything.” (Interview, executive director of a formerly Mainline Protestant, now ecumenical, neighborhood service organization)

In addition to providing money directly, some faith-based umbrella organizations helped their member FBOs financially in other ways, either by serving as the official conduit for government or United Way funds,<sup>10</sup> or by helping leverage foundation grants:

But XXX Foundation said they are giving \$10 million to the day schools if the Associated would match half of it - \$5 million, over a five-year period. The Associated went and made the commitment right then and there, without a dime... They are out raising it now, and I think they're raised \$2.9 million at this point in time. (Interview board member, Jewish community center)

The faith-based umbrellas in our study, therefore, provided many of the goal-seeking functions listed in Table I, together with the additional, “intermediary” role of preserving, monitoring, and certifying the faith identity of their member organizations.

### **“Economy” Umbrellas: Benefits for Faith Communities and FBOs**

#### ***Faith-Based Leadership Training***

In addition to the economy functions performed by secular umbrellas for their member organizations, some faith-based umbrellas also provide professional association services to the individuals working in their member FBOs. One of their educational efforts involves the mentoring of young faith community members into leadership roles within the component FBOs.

The Jewish Federations and the Catholic health care systems seemed particularly successful in imparting a specifically faith-based focus to this mentoring. For example:

I participated in the *Hakhsharah* program. ... It is connected to the Associated and it was a program with approximately 20 Jewish volunteer rising leaders who participated. And the point of the training was leadership training with a Jewish lens to it. In fact, we did do Talmud study during our sessions. It lasted for 14 months as a once-a-month, 4-hour class... What it did was connect the Jewish values and Jewish history to leadership examples – how to do things, how to function. (Interview, board chair, local Jewish FBO)

However, as Gumz (2008:278-9) noted, surfacing and training young faith community members to be leaders in sponsored FBOs is often difficult in aging denominations with declining memberships. Still, FBOs without umbrella organizations to perform this recruitment function were vulnerable to decline, or even extinction, when the founding generation ages, retires, and/or moves on. At least one evangelical respondent listed as his/her chief concern “that we haven’t communicated our vision to younger folk.”

Most of the faith-based umbrella organizations also provided secular professional training for administrators and staff. Respondents we interviewed at FBOs of several faith traditions mentioned with appreciation the training provided by their respective umbrella organizations on the various legal issues they might face. A respondent at a Mainline Protestant social service agency listed some of them:

(Interviewer) What kind of training have you had?

(Respondent) I have had some on racism because we serve all segments of society...

(Interviewer) Are there any other trainings that you recall?

(Respondent) Some sexual ethics trainings where we learn what are appropriate touches for youth ... There are many trainings that we have to have. De-escalation training – ... We have to learn to de-escalate problems without escalating ourselves. That was another training I had. (Interview with the director of Emergency Assistance, Mainline Protestant/ ecumenical service organization)

### ***Referrals for Board and Staff Positions***

Faith-based umbrella organizations also served as job referral sources for their member FBOs. Both Catholic and Jewish umbrella organizations directed the candidate searches for top administrators, and interviewed and hired the CEOs. There was a frequent rotation of executives



between component FBOs in each umbrella organization, from smaller to larger organizations and from lower to higher administrative levels. Both the Jewish Federations of North America and the various Catholic health care systems or diocesan education umbrellas served as clearing houses for job information.

Some faith-based umbrella organizations helped locate the board members for their member FBOs. This was an important and useful service. FBOs without umbrella organizations expressed regret over the lack of this assistance:

(Interviewer) Have you been able to talk to [the sponsoring faith community] about ways you could attract new board members?

(Respondent) We have been doing that. I had asked the superintendent for that and if he knew anybody around the conference. We have asked people for suggestions on names and things like that. Most of them said no.

(Interviewer) Was the superintendent helpful?

(Respondent) No. (Interview, executive director of a formerly Mainline Protestant, now ecumenical, neighborhood service organization)

Here, again, we find faith-based umbrellas providing some of the same “economy” functions that previous research has found to be provided by secular nonprofit umbrellas, together with additional services to strengthen their members’ links to the faith community.

### **“Polity” Umbrellas: Benefits for Faith Communities and FBOs**

#### ***Advocating and Educating on Issues***

Finally, many faith-based umbrellas help coordinate their members’ efforts to voice their concerns and promote their interests. This increases FBO influence, both within the faith community itself and with secular governmental agencies. As one Jewish respondent, the head of a local Federation, noted, his Federation had exercised leadership in the Jewish community across the country:

The Chair of the Joint Distribution Committee is from [city]. The Chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel is [from this city]. The immediate past chair from APAC is [from this city . . . That is pretty amazing. (Interview administrator, local Jewish Federation)

Catholic respondents noted a similar benefit:

But I think one of the greatest things about this merger [of several local Catholic social service agencies into a single Catholic Charities umbrella organization] – I think there's more that we can do as an agency to bring us a bit, ourselves, to the table, with the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops, which is right down the street, with Catholic Charities USA, which is in Arlington, VA, with the local archdiocesan offices to try to bridge some of those gaps, and when we bridge some of those gaps, I think, that will strengthen us in our mission, values, beliefs... (Interview, Manager of an agency within Catholic Charities)

The umbrella organizations also helped coordinate advocacy efforts aimed at influencing public governmental policy: the Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services regarding immigration reform, for example, and the Catholic Health Association for health care reform.

### **The Liabilities of Faith-Based Umbrella Systems**

#### ***Battleground for Contentious Issues***

Of course, umbrella systems are not purely and simply beneficial, either for their component FBOs or for their faith communities. One problem is that the component FBOs and/or various factions within the faith community may not agree over what the FBOs should be doing (or being). The umbrella organization may end up as a battleground for these factional disagreements, thus exacerbating intra-faith community divisions. Various Jewish respondents, for example, mentioned disagreements over Jewish practice: should the community centers be open on the Sabbath? How strict a level of Kashrut should be enforced there? Another disagreement was over whether the Jewish FBOs should serve only Jews or not. Similarly, several respondents both in a local Catholic hospital and in its umbrella health system cited complaints from individual Catholics over whether non-Christian programs such as yoga should be offered. The health care system also had to mediate disputes over the “Catholicity” of their hospitals’ medical practices:

(Respondent) I don't know if you are aware of the Texas issue that just came up with [a national Catholic newspaper] . . . Some anonymous group posted on one of those WIKI websites coding

data that indicated that abortions and sterilizations were done in [Texas] Catholic hospitals. They have data from 2000 and 2003. It is a complex issue . . . the abortion codes could cover multiple events like the death of a fetus in the womb and the removal of a dead fetus, or a person coming for treatment after an unsuccessful abortion attempt somewhere. It can cover many things. . . . We have worked with the Texas Catholic Conference [of Bishops] and all of the Texas hospitals to create a response to that article. (Interview, Senior Vice President of Mission at a national Catholic health system)

An additional complication arises when a health care system's component hospitals span several different dioceses across the country. In some areas, the local bishop allowed the hospitals to support the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure; in other dioceses, Catholic participation was forbidden because some of the monies raised were being sent to Planned Parenthood.

In a similar manner, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service had to mediate an intra-denominational controversy over U.S. immigration policy:

I think the issue itself is polarizing. We see both ends of the spectrum and everything in the middle within the Lutheran community. On one end of the spectrum we have clergy and other people who are into the New Sanctuary Movement, very radical. . . . LIRS, especially because we are a government agency, we can give a broad statement giving advice like, "If you are going to do this, keep this in mind," but we really can't endorse it. That has created some negative feelings in the New Sanctuary movement among the clergy. . . . On the other end of the spectrum there are people who think that the government is right in having strict immigration quotas and requiring documentation and all those things. (Interview, Director of Community Outreach, LIRS)

In all of these cases, the umbrella organization is cast into the undesirable role of mediating between ideologically opposed groups within the Faith Community. Another problem is that, to the extent that the umbrella organization is national in scope and thus further removed from the local faith community, it may be seen as an outsider foisting secular values or practices upon the local FBO.

Since the research for this study was done, a contentious issue has arisen that illustrates these dilemmas. In the early months of 2010, when President Obama's health care bill was being voted on in Congress, the National Council of Catholic Bishops opposed it, saying that it did not contain adequate safeguards preventing the funding of abortion. However, the Catholic Health Association *supported* this bill, reflecting the judgment and interests of its member hospitals and

health systems. In this instance, the CHA was being pulled between the conflicting demands of the larger faith community to which its own sponsoring faith community (still the religious orders, at this time) was putatively subject, and the interests of its member FBOs (Fox 2010).

### ***Fundraising Difficulties***

As several of our respondents noted, the conflicts mentioned in the preceding section risk alienating potential financial contributors. There are also other aspects of umbrella organizations that make it harder to raise money. One is the unwillingness of contributors to send monies to a common funding pool:

And we were also hearing that this next generation... wanted to follow their money. So many people would say to me, "Well, I'm giving, but I'm not giving to that black hole of Calcutta, I'm giving directly to the JFS; I'm giving directly to the JCC." I'd have to say, "Well, you won't get credit for your Associated gift." "Well, frankly, I don't care," they'd say. "I want to know where my money's going so I want it to go directly to the JCC. (Interview, retired former administrator for local Jewish federation)

Another problem is that an independent FBO *not* covered by the umbrella organization's funding may find that its donors assume – wrongly – that the umbrella organization is covering its expenses. One Catholic vocational training center run by a religious order of sisters, which received no funding from the diocesan Catholic Charities, reported having this difficulty.

In a time of tightened available funds, many umbrella organizations reported that there was fighting among their member FBOs over a shrinking pie

A local health ministry gets so caught up in its need. When they vote on some need, whether it is a program or a community effort or building, they are so emotionally involved that they want it *now*. . . Maybe some of those capital needs have to be scheduled. We can't require [health system] to produce locally for ten institutions \$100 million all in one month. But locally, when we have to sit back and watch our pet project instead of beginning in January of this year – maybe it has to be January of next year (Interview, former member of a Catholic religious order's provincial council and board member of their local hospital)

Some agencies objected to these limitations on their autonomy:

Having worked as a consultant with one of the agencies last year with fundraising, to help them learn to fundraise, they couldn't make a move without checking with somebody at the Associated, we couldn't solicit a particular prospect without checking with the Associated. If I had been in my old position at the Associated, I would have said, "Of course, you can't do that without checking with the Associated because you go to that donor and you get a gift from them, and then we come

to them in the campaign and they say ‘Sorry, I’ve given away what I would have given,’ that would be a disaster.” (Interview, former administrator, local Jewish federation)

One Catholic housing agency withdrew from Catholic Charities over precisely this issue:

When [the new administrator] came in, he put – first of all he changed the board structure [of the diocesan Catholic Charities] and he put corporate people on the board, big shots to raise money, and he reconstituted Charities into a real hierarchical structure ... The tensions were that Catholic Charities kept reducing our United Way monies and I got nervous ... in fact, I held money back one year to see what they would do and clearly they were upset that I did that and they made it clear that we were not going to get more United Way money again. So that was kind of the handwriting on the wall for me, when I saw that I said, “Geez, if we’re not going to get any money from them, why are we going to hang around here?” (Interview, director of a currently independent, formerly Catholic, housing assistance center)

These tensions over resource flows and autonomy mirror those that have been observed between other nonprofit umbrellas and their member organizations, most notably the United Way.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Bureaucratic Alienation***

The limitations on autonomy led to other difficulties. Forced mergers eliminated jobs, which led to worker alienation or to simple confusion – respondents at both the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and Catholic Charities mentioned that local churches and clients alike were often unclear about exactly what agency was in charge of what. Respondents in religious orders whose hospitals were now part of a national health system mentioned that patients and staff still believed that the sisters were in charge. Some of our Catholic and Lutheran respondents also believed that amalgamation under umbrella agencies diluted the links between local congregations and the needy.

Another complaint was that the umbrella organizations did not really eliminate competition. Interviews with Jewish respondents revealed struggles over funding and clients between the Federation and the synagogue-based Hebrew day schools, between Jewish Community Centers and synagogues, and among the Jewish member FBOs:

The relationship is extremely complex when it comes to our sister organizations. There is always some rub between us and [another Federation agency] as to where their programs begin and end. I have made no bones about it – that they have come out with a new tag line – “For the best in child,

aging, and family services, think [agency name].” I did not think that was a very nice way for a sister agency to behave. (Interview, Jewish agency CEO)

Both Catholic and Jewish agency administrators also worried about whether FBO board members might experience a conflict of loyalties:

There is a fiduciary problem. To the extent that someone has voting privileges in both bodies there can be a conflict. I think that is coming more and more to the fore in the Jewish community. That is not so much between an agency and the Federation as a member of our board may also be a member of two or three other boards or may be on the professional staff of another organization. When it comes to sharing information, keeping information confidential, looking for funds, what have you, there can be some rather ugly conflicts of interests, or the chance of that. (Interview, head of a local Jewish umbrella organization)

Some Catholic religious orders expressed similar worries. Does the religious sister on an FBO board represent the interests of her order or the FBO?

## **Conclusions**

All in all, therefore, umbrella organizations appear to have both positive and negative effects, both for their component FBOs and for their sponsoring faith communities. On the one hand, faith-based umbrellas can provide certification and education that help preserve the religious character of an FBO, as well as useful secular professional training. They can help locate and train new leaders, assist in fundraising and long-range planning, foster inter-organizational collaboration, and provide a collective voice for their member FBOs with both denominational and secular authorities. They are also often invaluable in helping their component FBOs resist threats to their religious identity or their very existence:

- Government regulations may require a FBO to adopt policies that it sees as antithetical to the teachings or beliefs of its faith community. For example, new legislation in one city would have required a local Catholic agency to place adopted and foster care children with same-sex couples. The agency would have been forced either to go against its religious beliefs or dissolve. Since the FBO was part of the diocese’s Catholic Charities,

however, the larger umbrella was able to transfer its foster care services to a secular service provider with no disruption either to the workers or the clients.

- Umbrella organizations protect FBOs in cases where the sponsoring Faith Community itself is in decline. One ecumenical community revitalization organization, sponsored by Mainline Protestant and Catholic churches, eventually dissolved because it was not able to raise sufficient funds from the local congregations that had originally sponsored them. In contrast, the Catholic hospitals are insulated from the decline of their originally-sponsoring orders by the development of umbrella systems.
- The death or departure of the original founder(s) is also a precarious time for FBOs. At such a time, organizations without a continuing institutional sponsor are vulnerable, either to dissolution – as several evangelical and African American FBOs noted – or to secularization, as appears to be happening to the independent Catholic housing assistance organization in our study. Umbrella organizations, in contrast, can supply the continuing connection with the faith community once the original founders are no longer present.

On the other hand, umbrella organizations are not a universal panacea. Their greater size, bureaucratic procedures, and often geographical separation from local FBOs cannot readily substitute for the “white hot mobilization” of the founding generation (Lofland 1979). Many of the evangelical and African-American FBOs in our study displayed a sense of mission and purpose far exceeding the more professionalized culture at FBOs subordinated to large umbrella organizations. The danger of losing both the FBO’s religious identity and its connection with its founding faith community is greater, the larger and more bureaucratized its umbrella organization becomes. Distant umbrellas may also not be sufficiently informed regarding local needs to allocate resources optimally, and potential funders may not be as willing to donate to

centralized fundraising efforts. Careerism and political maneuvering among the administrators of both the umbrella organization and its FBO members may substitute for the religious motivations that had driven the original founders.

The underlying theological culture of each faith tradition ultimately determines whether it will prefer unitary or federative structures for its umbrella organizations or, indeed, whether it accords any legitimacy to umbrella structures at all. The more congregationally-oriented faith traditions – some of the Mainline and Evangelical Protestant denominations, nondenominational Christian churches, and some African-American churches – hold that the responsibility for helping the needy belongs to the local congregation, or even to each individual Christian. This belief has inhibited the development of faith-based umbrellas in these traditions. Other traditions, such as Catholicism and Judaism, teach that attending to societal ills is a communal responsibility. It is no accident that these latter traditions are likely to have more established umbrella systems.

The varying organizational structures of each tradition – its centralized authority or the primacy of its local congregations – also affect the way it relates to its FBOs and its umbrella organizations. How much power the umbrellas have vis a vis their component member FBOs and their sponsoring faith community will vary accordingly. All this makes attempts to categorize FBO/umbrella relationships according to previous studies of secular nonprofits somewhat difficult. In any case, however, a comparative knowledge of the benefits and liabilities of umbrella organizations will help each faith community determine their role, if any, in the constellation of FBOs that community has established. This paper is an attempt to illustrate some of the rich variety of faith-based umbrella organizations, both for faith communities and for academic researchers studying such organizations in the larger nonprofit sector.



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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> These included Mainline Protestant denominations (Methodists, Disciples of Christ, Lutherans), Roman Catholics (in two different dioceses and two religious orders), African American Churches (Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal), Quakers, nondenominational Evangelical congregations, and Jewish institutions in two different cities. An Islamic organization was also included in the pilot study, but was unwilling to participate in the later research.

<sup>2</sup> As pointed out in the introduction to this issue (Schneider date), the present study includes four basic types of FBO: 1.) schools (K-12), 2.) social service (emergency services, adult education, after school, multi-service social service, poverty prevention, foster care, etc.), 3.) hospitals, health care systems, and senior services, and 4.) community development programs. Although many faith traditions also sponsor colleges and universities, such institutions were not included in our sample.

<sup>3</sup> For example, one African-American pastor called himself "the chief cultural architect" who was responsible for articulating the faith component in his congregation's several FBOs. At other times, an individual congregant would be "led" to begin a ministry, and the pastor or minister would provide little or no assistance:

The way the Church of God is organized, the minister has little to do with the ministries and if they make it, they do so because the person in charge of the ministry is persistent. These two ministries [a food pantry and a clothing room] receive no financial support from the church. (Field summary, evangelical church FBOs)

<sup>4</sup> The NAO is one of three types of network association described by Provan and Kenis: the other two – "Participant-Governed Networks," in which there is no separate and unique governance entity, and "Lead Organization-Governed Networks," where (e.g.) a hospital serves as the lead organization coordinating the activities of a plethora of small suppliers, clinics, and contractors – would NOT be considered umbrella organizations according to the definition used here.

<sup>5</sup> Brilliant and Young (2004:26) note that federated community service organizations operate largely at local and regional levels, and are concentrated mostly in human services. In contrast, the umbrella organizations considered in this paper also include national-level organizations, and organizations concerned with schools and health care.

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<sup>6</sup> These data are more than 20 years old, and are, Young admits, an estimate. I could find no more recent data on the percentage of nonprofits that are members of umbrella associations. Gumz (2008:275) merely repeats Young's earlier figures. As one of the anonymous reviewers of this article noted, there is still very little research on this topic in the nonprofit literature.

<sup>7</sup> These included Frankford Group Ministry, Project Garrison, the Severna Park Assistance Network, and GEDCO (the Govans Ecumenical Development Corporation). All of these are separate FBOs in their own right, not umbrella organizations.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the National Catholic Education Association does this.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Julian (2001) and Provan, Beyer, and Kruytbosch (1980).

<sup>10</sup> Catholic Charities, Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services provide this conduit service.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Julian (2001) and Provan, Beyer, and Kruytbosch (1980).

**Table I.**  
**Typologies of Nonprofit Umbrella Organizations**

<b>Type of Organization<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Purpose Of the Umbrella Organization<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Role(s) of the Umbrella Organization vis a vis the Member Organizations<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Governance: Relative Power of the Umbrella Organization<sup>c,a</sup></b>
<b><i>“Goal-Seeking Systems”</i></b>	Achieve system-wide goals	<u>Fiscal Intermediary</u> : allocate funding <u>Economic Regulator</u> : oversee operations; reward compliance; certify authenticity/reliability <u>Community Problem-Solver</u> : surface and address community problems <u>Charitable Mutual Fund</u> : collect and manage individual donor funds	<u>Unitary/Centralized</u> Hierarchical/Bureaucratic governance
<b><i>“Economies”</i></b>	Obtain resources and services more efficiently than would be possible for an individual nonprofit acting alone	<u>Community Problem-Solver</u> : surface and address community problems <u>Provide professional resources and services</u>	<u>Federative</u> Decentralized/Democratic governance Reciprocity/Exchange relationships
<b><i>“Politics”</i></b>	Provide a forum to work out common positions, strategies, and collaborations	<u>Community Problem-Solver</u> : surface and address community problems <u>Social Change Agent</u> : surface community problems and work to change their causes	<u>Coalitional</u> Shared governance Convening power: (i.e. the umbrella organization has no power over the member organizations) Persuasion/consensus

<sup>a</sup> Young (2001)    <sup>b</sup> Brilliant and Young (2004)

<sup>c</sup> Warren (1969)

**Table II.**  
**The Roles of Faith-Based Umbrella Organizations**

Type of Organization	Purpose Of the Umbrella Organization	Role(s) Organization vis a vis the Member Organizations	Governance Relative Power of the Umbrella Organization
<p><b>“Goal-Seeking Systems”</b></p> <p><u>Examples:</u> Jewish Federation in a given city Catholic Charities in a given diocese Various Catholic Health Systems Lutheran Services in America United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries Friends Services for the Aging</p>	Achieve system-wide goals	<p><u>Fiscal Intermediary:</u> allocate funds <u>Economic Regulator:</u> oversee operations; reward compliance; <u>Community Problem-Solver:</u> surface and address community problems <u>Charitable Mutual Fund:</u> collect and manage individual donor funds <b><u>Intermediary Functions:</u></b> <i><u>Faith Community Certification:</u> certify authenticity/reliability</i> <i><u>Provide faith development</u></i> <i><u>Resources:</u> Videos, booklets, training sessions, retreats, etc.</i></p>	<p><u>Unitary/Centralized</u> Hierarchical/Bureaucratic</p>
<p><b>“Economies”</b></p> <p><u>Examples:</u> Solomon Schechter Day School Association Friends Council on Education Catholic Health Association</p>	Obtain resources and services more efficiently than would be possible for an individual nonprofit acting alone	<p><u>Community Problem-Solver:</u> surface and address community problems <u>Provide professional resources</u> <b><u>Professional Association Functions:</u></b> <i><u>Leadership recruitment and development from the faith community</u></i> <i><u>Professional Association services for individuals in FBOs</u></i></p>	<p><u>Federative</u> Decentralized/Democratic governance</p>
<p><b>“Politics”</b></p> <p><u>Examples:</u> Catholic Health Association Lutheran Services in America Friends Services for the Aging</p>	Provide a forum to work out common positions, strategies, and collaborations	<p><u>Community Problem-Solver:</u> surface and address community problems <u>Social Change Agent:</u> surface community problems and work for change <b><u>Intermediary Functions:</u></b> <i><u>Liaison with Faith Community on Policy</u></i></p>	<p><u>Coalitional</u> Shared governance Convening power: (i.e. the umbrella organization has no power over the member organizations Persuasion/consensus</p>